

PETER LEGRIS

GALLERY 44

TORONTO

In the artist's statement that accompanies this show is the seemingly incongruous pairing of melancholia with delight. Albrecht Durer (1471-1528) and Robert Burton (1577-1640) would find nothing strange in this curious symbiosis. Durer's melancholic angel is surrounded by all the delights a curious thinker could desire; and Burton, in his obsessive *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, sets the reader awash in a sea of historical minutia. Peter Legris has begun the first steps down this same relativistic path. This show of paintings and photoworks keeps a delicate balance between the cold isolation of industrial society and the childish enthusiasm of an individual collecting and describing everyday objects.

Almost all of the paintings in the show consist of black and white photographs stuck onto board or canvas. All the photographs are of banal subjects: tree, boat, face, car, chimney. Paint (blue, ochre, green, rusted orange) provides the landscape, the context, the background. The photographs remain isolated from one another by the boundaries that paint has imposed and yet, at the same time, they are contiguous subjects that speak with one another in their own language. It is a language that the viewer attempts to overhear and when that is not possible, fabricates.

In *Fifteen Heads*, Legris has placed fifteen photographs of his own head in neat rows: five across, three down. The heads are swallowed up by a rich blue sea, a sky that gathers them together, connects them and yet keeps them apart. The heads peer off in different directions, sombre, calm, inquisitive. A world of possibilities, each head locked within its own private dream. The heads speak with quiet voices, a few words shared, a few thoughts handed around. Each adaptation of the object (the human head, the photograph of a head, the paint applied to the photograph) removes it from our understanding, separates it from the head that all this information came from. Then, after we've been rebuffed, we go back inside the painting and look at these eyes looking back at us. The viewer is welcomed into this schizophrenic comaraderie. The blank gaze of the viewer star-

ing back at the blank gaze of the heads. The painter, I think, has taken delight in these heads. He has looked into their eyes and seen himself. The viewer looks into these eyes and sees a familiar mirror. The heads look back at the viewer and welcome the gaze, the interest bestowed upon them. The subject of the viewer is the subject of the painting is the subject of the heads is the subject of the photographs is the subject of the painter.

*Untitled (Interior with Boat, Plane and Cloud)* circumscribes the interior of a room: walls, ceiling, floor. On one wall a photograph of a cloud becomes an ethereal window casting its own smokey light. On the floor, a boat adrift on the hard slab and a plane tipped on its tail. Both the plane and the boat cast cloudy shadows. Here again are objects transfigured, embellished, adorned. Discrete objects of the world are randomly, specifically arranged: the plane quietly poised for flight, the boat's massive hull, here, just large enough to hold in the hand. Liberation and containment act out their rhythmic dance. The clear definitions of interior poked through by a cloud, a shard of white glass. The plane becomes a toy and the ship a flabby world of metal landlocked within the paint's boundaries. The contrast is between precise definition and nebulous possibility, between the object photographed and the paint that consumes it.

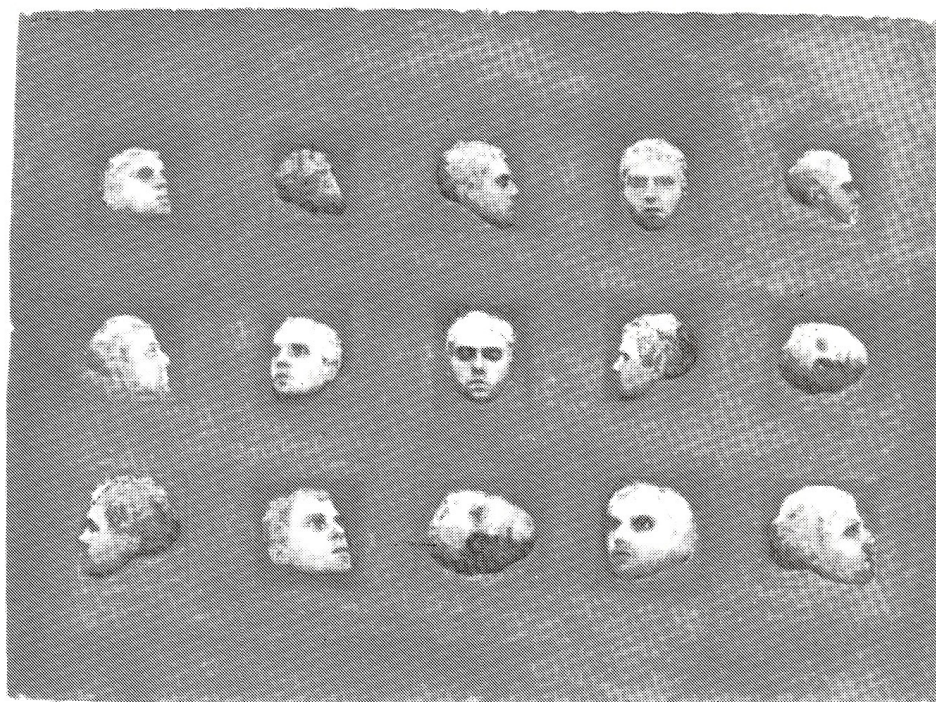
In *Undulated Landscape*, random build-

ing-blocks of colour map out a patchy landscape. Eleven chimneys find homes here, set themselves down and wait for the sun (some far-off lightsource to the east that hasn't yet mastered the art of casting uniform shadows) to see them. Again, as in *Fifteen Heads*, there is a conversation at work, just quiet enough that we can't hear it with human ears and instead must rely upon our own internal voices to supply the syllables, the sounds. A neighbourhood of chimneys, a wavering field of concrete and brick forms.

At the heart of melancholy is a wealth of unfulfilled opportunities, of questions, desires, wishes. It is possibility that delights, the ability to rearrange and create. Within the best paintings there is a wind of perpetual stillness, a standing wave motion set up between static objects. I think that only thinking people can be melancholy: only those self-obsessed enough to worry about worrying — to see delight and want it, even knowing that it is just out of our reach.

The paintings in this show are obsessed with statement, with intellect; they give you something to enjoy (though that word is so far out of fashion as to almost be an insult), something to ponder, something to store away in your mind's pocket for another day. These paintings cast light and shadow back onto the viewer. That's a rare occurrence.

Peter O'Brien



PETER LEGRIS; 15 heads; 1988; acrylic, photographs and oil pastel on paper, 77 x 57 cm